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STATE FOR SCA/INS, USPACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: [OPPOSITION LEADER PROVIDES GLOOMY ASSESSMENT TO CO-CHAIRS](#)

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: In a meeting with Co-Chair and other key Ambassadors on January 11, Opposition and UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe criticized the GSL for abrogating the cease-fire agreement, failing to come forward with a devolution package, and continued human rights abuses. He predicted the GSL would pursue a military solution that could result in thousands more casualties and displaced persons. When pressed by the Ambassador and others, he promised that if the government comes up with a credible power sharing proposal that the Co-chairs and India could support, the UNP would also support it. Wickremesinghe indicated there is now a consensus candidate to fill the remaining vacancy on the Constitutional Council. The Council should therefore nominate its own candidates to head the Elections, Police, Bribery and other Commissions under its purview so the President's appointees can be removed and these Commissions can exercise independent authority. End Summary.

CFA Abrogation a Negative Step

12. (C) Wickremesinghe characterized the CFA abrogation as a negative step. He also criticized the government for failing to come forward with a devolution package that would be acceptable to Tamil and other communities. He recalled the repeated promises the President had made in 2007 to complete the APRC proposals, all of which have been broken. With the CFA abrogation the government was also going back on its support for a negotiated settlement, he said. He asserted the government's focus on implementing the 13th Amendment was disingenuous because the APRC process was meant to go beyond the 13th Amendment. The government's failure to act means that Sri Lanka's multi-ethnic identity was at risk.

13. (C) Wickremesinghe said human rights were also a major concern. The President's Commission of Inquiry had made no progress. Pressures against the independent media such as journalist Iqbal Athas continued unabated. Tamil parliamentarians faced increasing threats. Finally, the continued illegal activities of the paramilitaries in the

east mean that free and fair elections cannot be held there, he argued.

Dire Consequences of Military Solution

¶4. (C) Wickremesinghe predicted that the government would pursue a military solution in the north. He estimated that fighting could cause as many as 40,000 additional deaths and large numbers of new internally displaced persons. He expressed his satisfaction that the government had asked Norway and the Co-chairs to continue. However, he conceded that it was unlikely that the government would pursue peace talks with the LTTE any time soon and therefore suggested that the Co-chair role would become more like that of a contact group.

UNP to Support Credible APRC Proposal

¶5. (C) Ambassador noted press reports that the government would come forth with an APRC proposal on January 23. He said government insiders had indicated these proposals would mark a first step with other possible additional steps to follow later. Ambassador urged Wickremesinghe and the UNP to support any credible proposals that emerge. He said that while the government had authority under the 13th Amendment to implement some of its proposals, the more far reaching ideas would require constitutional changes and therefore the support of 2/3 of parliament. The Ambassador urged that the UNP work constructively with the government provided the proposals had merit. The Ambassadors of Japan, Canada and Switzerland supported the Ambassador's suggestion that the UNP put aside partisan differences for the national interest. Wickremesinghe expressed doubt that the government would put

forward a substantial APRC proposal. When pressed he promised that if the government comes up with a credible power sharing proposal that the Co-chairs and India could support, the UNP would also support it.

Constitutional Council Should Appoint New Heads of Commissions

¶6. (C) Wickremesinghe told the Ambassadors that the Organization of Professional Associations and several political parties had nominated a consensus candidate to fill the remaining vacancy on the Constitutional Council. (Note: the Council is supposed to appoint independent members of independent Commissions such as the Elections, Bribery and Police Commissions. The failure of the parties to agree on a consensus candidate has prevented the Council from operating and allowed the President to appoint unilaterally heads of these commissions who were supportive of the Government. End Note.) Wickremesinghe said that the JHU had attempted to break consensus by nominating an alternative candidate. Despite that, he said the UNP and all other parties now believe that with a majority of parties in favor of a consensus candidate the constitution gives the President the authority to appoint the consensus candidate. Ambassador asked about the procedures for nominating new independent heads of the commissions under the purview of the Constitutional Council. Wickremesinghe responded that the Council can and should nominate its own candidates for the President's approval.

¶7. (C) Comment: Wickremesinghe's grudging willingness to support a credible APRC proposal is welcome. Given his bitter relations with the President, he is probably gambling the President will be unable or unwilling to come up with a credible proposal. The President lacks the two thirds Parliamentary majority he needs and faces new difficulties after the JVP announced over the weekend it would oppose any APRC proposal at this stage. The negotiation of a consensus candidate to fill the last seat on the Constitutional Council is a welcome development. Embassy will encourage the parties represented on the Council to proceed with nominations of independent candidates to head these important Commissions.

But JHU and other pressures may yet stymie progress.
BLAKE